

Right in the van,
 On the red rampart's slippery swell,
 With heart that beat a charge, he fell
 Foeward, as fits a man ;
 But the high soul burns on to light men's feet 55
 Where death for noble ends makes dying sweet ;
 His life her crescent's span
 Orbs full with share in their undarkening days
 Who ever climbed the battailous steeps of praise
 Since valor's praise began. 60

III

His life's expense
 Hath won him coeternal youth
 With the immaculate prime of Truth ;
 While we, who make pretence
 At living on, and wake and eat and sleep, 65
 And life's stale trick by repetition keep,
 Our fickle permanence
 (A poor leaf-shadow on a brook, whose play
 Of busy idlesse ceases with our day)
 Is the mere cheat of sense. 70

We bide our chance,
 Unhappy, and make terms with Fate
 A little more to let us wait ;
 He leads for aye the advance,
 Hope's forlorn-hopes that plant the desperate good
 For nobler Earths and days of manlier mood ; 76
 Our wall of circumstance
 Cleared at a bound, he flashes o'er the fight,
 A saintly shape of fame, to cheer the right
 And steel each wavering glance. 80

I write of one,
 While with dim eyes I think of three ;
 Who weeps not others fair and brave as he ?
 Ah, when the fight is won,
 Dear Land, whom triflers now make bold to scorn, 85
 (Thee! from whose forehead Earth awaits her
 morn,)
 How nobler shall the sun
 Flame in thy sky, how braver breathe thy air,
 That thou bred'st children who for thee could dare
 And die as thine have done ! 90

MR. HOSEA BIGLOW TO THE EDITOR OF THE
ATLANTIC MONTHLY

[When the war for the Union broke out, Mr. Lowell contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* a second series of *Biglow Papers*, and just before the close of the war published the poem that follows.]

DEAR SIR, — Your letter come to han'
 Requestin' me to please be funny ;
 But I ain't made upon a plan
 Thet knows wut 's comin', gall or honey : 5
 Ther' 's times the world doos look so queer,
 Odd fancies come afore I call 'em ;
 An' then agin, for half a year,
 No preacher 'thout a call 's more solemn.
 You're 'n want o' sunthin' light an' cute,
 Rattlin' an' shrewd an' kin' o' jingleish, 10
 An' wish, pervidin' it 'ould suit,
 I 'd take an' citify my English.

I *ken* write long-tailed, ef I please, —
 But when I'm jokin', no, I thankee;
 Then, 'fore I know it, my idees
 Run helter-skelter into Yankee. 15

Sence I begun to scribble rhyme,
 I tell ye wut, I hain't ben foolin';
 The parson's books, life, death, an' time
 Hev took some trouble with my schoolin'; 20
 Nor th' airth don't git put out with me,
 Thet love her 'z though she wuz a woman;
 Why, th' ain't a bird upon the tree
 But half forgives my bein' human.

An' yit I love th' unhighschool'd way 25
 Ol' farmers hed when I wuz younger;
 Their talk wuz meatier, an' 'ould stay,
 While book-froth seems to whet your hunger;
 For puttin' in a downright lick
 'Twixt Humbug's eyes, ther' 's few can metch it,
 An' then it helves my thoughts ez slick 31
 Ez stret-grained hickory doos a hetchet.

But when I can't, I can't, thet 's all,
 For Natur' won't put up with gullin';
 Idees you hev to shove an' haul 36
 Like a druv pig ain't wuth a mullein:
 Live thoughts ain't sent for; thru all rifts
 O' sense they pour an' resh ye onwards,
 Like rivers when south-lyin' drifts
 Feel thet th' old airth 's a-wheelin' sunwards. 40

Time wuz, the rhymes come crowdin' thick
 Ez office-seekers arter 'lection,

An' into ary place 'ould stick
 Without no bother nor objection;
 But sence the war my thoughts hang back 45
 Ez though I wanted to enlist 'em,
 An' subs'tutes — *they* don't never lack,
 But then they 'll slope afore you 've mist 'em.

Nothin' don't seem like wut it wuz;
 I can't see wut there is to hender, 50
 An' yit my brains jes' go buzz, buzz,
 Like bumblebees agin a winder;
 'Fore these times come, in all airth's row,
 Ther' wuz one quiet place, my head in,
 Where I could hide an' think, — but now 55
 It's all one teeter, hopin', dreadin'.

Where 's Peace? I start, some clear-blown night,
 When gaunt stone walls grow numb an' number,
 An', creakin' 'cross the snow-crus' white,
 Walk the col' starlight into summer; 60
 Up grows the moon, an' swell by swell
 Thru the pale pasturs silvers dimmer
 Than the last smile thet strives to tell
 O' love gone heavenward in its shimmer.

I hev ben gladder o' sech things 65
 Than cocks o' spring or bees o' clover,
 They filled my heart with livin' springs,
 But now they seem to freeze 'em over;
 Sights innercent ez babes on knee,
 Peaceful ez eyes o' pastur'd cattle, 70
 Jes' coz they be so, seem to me
 To rile me more with thoughts o' battle.

In-doors an' out by spells I try;
 Ma'am Natur' keeps her spin-wheel goin',
 But leaves my natur' stiff and dry
 Ez fiel's o' clover arter mowin';
 An' her jes' keepin' on the same,
 Calmer 'n a clock, an' never carin',
 An' findin' nary thing to blame,
 Is wus than ef she took to swearin'.

Snow-flakes come whispurin' on the pane,
 The charm makes blazin' logs so pleasant,
 But I can't hark to wut they 're say'n',
 With Grant or Sherman ollers present;
 The chimbleys shudder in the gale,
 Thet lulls, then suddin takes to flappin'
 Like a shot hawk, but all 's ez stale
 To me ez so much sperit-rappin'.

Under the yaller-pines I house,
 When sunshine makes 'em all sweet-scented,
 An' hear among their furry boughs
 The baskin' west-wind purr contented,
 While 'way o'erhead, ez sweet an' low
 Ez distant bells thet ring for meetin',
 The wedged wil' geese their bugles blow,
 Further an' further South retreatin'.

Or up the slippery knob I strain
 An' see a hundred hills like islan's
 Lift their blue woods in broken chain
 Out o' the sea o' snowy silence;
 The farm-smokes, sweetes' sight on airth,
 Slow thru the winter air a-shrinkin'

Seem kin' o' sad, an' roun' the hearth
 Of empty places set me thinkin'.

Beaver roars hoarse with meltin' snows,
 An' rattles di'mon's from his granite;
 Time wuz, he snatched away my prose,
 An' into psalms or satires ran it;
 But he, nor all the rest thet once
 Started my blood to country-dances,
 Can't set me goin' more 'n a dunce
 Thet hain't no use for dreams an' fancies.

Rat-tat-tat-tattle thru the street
 I hear the drummers makin' riot,
 An' I set thinkin' o' the feet
 Thet follered once an' now are quiet,—
 White feet ez snowdrops innercent,
 Thet never knowed the paths o' Satan,
 Whose comin' step ther' 's ears thet won't,
 No, not lifelong, leave off awaitin'.

Why, hain't I held 'em on my knee?
 Did n't I love to see 'em growin',
 Three likely lads ez wal could be,
 Hahnsome an' brave an' not tu knowin'?
 I set an' look into the blaze
 Whose natur', jes' like theirn, keeps climbin',
 Ez long 'z it lives, in shinin' ways,
 An' half despise myself for rhymin'.

Wut 's words to them whose faith an' truth
 On War's red techstone rang true metal,
 105 Beaver Brook, a tributary of the Charles.

Who ventered life an' love an' youth
 For the gret prize o' death in battle?
 To him who, deadly hurt, agen
 Flashed on afore the charge's thunder,
 Tippin' with fire the bolt of men
 Thet rived the Rebel line asunder? 136

'T ain't right to hev the young go fust,
 All throbbin' full o' gifts an' graces,
 Leavin' life's paupers dry ez dust
 To try an' make b'lieve fill their places: 144
 Nothin' but tells us wut we miss,
 Ther' 's gaps our lives can't never fay in,
 An' *thet* world seems so fur from this
 Lef' for us loafers to grow gray in!

My eyes cloud up for rain; my mouth 145
 Will take to twitchin' roun' the corners,
 I pity mothers, tu, down South,
 For all they sot among the scornors:
 I'd sooner take my chance to stan'
 At Jedgment where your meanest slave is, 150
 Than at God's bar hol' up a han'
 Ez drippin' red ez yourn, Jeff Davis!

Come, Peace! not like a mourner bowed
 For honor lost an' dear ones wasted,
 But proud, to meet a people proud, 155
 With eyes thet tell o' triumph tasted!
 Come, with han' grippin' on the hilt,
 An' step thet proves ye Victory's daughter!
 Longin' for you, our sperits wilt
 Like shipwrecked men's on raf's for water. 160

Come, while our country feels the lift
 Of a gret instinct shoutin' "Forwards!"
 An' knows thet freedom ain't a gift
 Thet tarries long in han's o' cowards!
 Come, sech ez mothers prayed for, when 165
 They kissed their cross with lips thet quivered,
 An' bring fair wages for brave men,
 A nation saved, a race delivered!

THE FIRST SNOW-FALL

[In a letter to Sydney H. Gay, dated Elmwood, December 22, 1849, Lowell wrote: "Print *that* as if you loved it. Let not a comma be blundered. Especially I fear they will put '*gleaming*' for '*gloaming*' in the first line unless you look to it. May you never have the key which shall unlock the whole meaning of the poem to you!"]

THE snow had begun in the gloaming,
 And busily all the night
 Had been heaping field and highway
 With a silence deep and white.

Every pine and fir and hemlock 5
 Wore ermine too dear for an earl,
 And the poorest twig on the elm-tree
 Was ridged inch-deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara
 Came Chanticleer's muffled crow, 10
 The stiff rails were softened to swan's-down,
 And still fluttered down the snow.

9. The marble of Carrara, Italy, is noted for its purity.

I stood and watched by the window
 The noiseless work of the sky,
 And the sudden flurries of snow-birds,
 Like brown leaves whirling by.

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn
 Where a little headstone stood ;
 How the flakes were folding it gently,
 As did robins the babes in the wood.

Up spoke our own little Mabel,
 Saying, " Father, who makes it snow ?"
 And I told of the good All-father
 Who cares for us here below.

Again I looked at the snow-fall,
 And thought of the leaden sky
 That arched o'er our first great sorrow,
 When that mound was heaped so high.

I remembered the gradual patience
 That fell from that cloud like snow,
 Flake by flake, healing and hiding
 The scar of our deep-plunged woe.

And again to the child I whispered,
 " The snow that husheth all,
 Darling, the merciful Father
 Alone can make it fall !"

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her ;
 And she, kissing back, could not know
 That *my* kiss was given to her sister,
 Folded close under deepening snow.

THE CHANGELING

I HAD a little daughter,
 And she was given to me
 To lead me gently backward
 To the Heavenly Father's knee,
 That I, by the force of nature,
 Might in some dim wise divine
 The depth of his infinite patience
 To this wayward soul of mine.

I know not how others saw her,
 But to me she was wholly fair,
 And the light of the heaven she came from
 Still lingered and gleamed in her hair ;
 For it was as wavy and golden,
 And as many changes took,
 As the shadows of sun-gilt ripples
 On the yellow bed of a brook.

To what can I liken her smiling
 Upon me, her kneeling lover,
 How it leaped from her lips to her eyelids,
 And dimpled her wholly over,
 Till her outstretched hands smiled also,
 And I almost seemed to see
 The very heart of her mother
 Sending sun through her veins to me !

She had been with us scarce a twelve-month,
 And it hardly seemed a day,

When a troop of wandering angels
 Stole my little daughter away ;
 Or perhaps those heavenly Zingari
 But loosed the hampering strings, 30
 And when they had opened her cage-door,
 My little bird used her wings.

But they left in her stead a changeling,
 A little angel child,
 That seems like her bud in full blossom, 35
 And smiles as she never smiled :
 When I wake in the morning, I see it
 Where she always used to lie,
 And I feel as weak as a violet
 Alone 'neath the awful sky. 40

• As weak, yet as trustful also ;
 For the whole year long I see
 All the wonders of faithful Nature
 Still worked for the love of me ;
 Winds wander, and dews drip earthward, 45
 Rain falls, suns rise and set,
 Earth whirls, and all but to prosper
 A poor little violet.

This child is not mine as the first was,
 I cannot sing it to rest, 50
 I cannot lift it up fatherly
 And bliss it upon my breast :
 Yet it lies in my little one's cradle
 And sits in my little one's chair,
 And the light of the heaven she's gone to 55
 Transfigures its golden hair.

THE FOOT-PATH

It mounts athwart the windy hill
 Through sallow slopes of upland bare,
 And Fancy climbs with foot-fall still
 Its narrowing curves that end in air

By day, a warmer-hearted blue 5
 Stoops softly to that topmost swell ;
 Its thread-like windings seem a clue
 To gracious climes where all is well.

By night, far yonder, I surmise
 An ampler world than clips my ken, 10
 Where the great stars of happier skies
 Commingle nobler fates of men.

I look and long, then haste me home,
 Still master of my secret rare ;
 Once tried, the path would end in Rome, 15
 But now it leads me everywhere.

Forever to the new it guides,
 From former good, old overmuch ;
 What Nature for her poets hides,
 'T is wiser to divine than clutch. 20

The bird I list hath never come
 Within the scope of mortal ear ;
My prying step would make him dumb,
 And the fair tree, his shelter, sear.

Behind the hill, behind the sky,
 Behind my inmost thought, he sings;
 No feet avail; to hear it nigh,
 The song itself must lend the wings.

Sing on, sweet bird, close hid, and raise
 Those angel stairways in my brain,
 That climb from these low-vaulted days
 To spacious sunshines far from pain.

Sing when thou wilt, enchantment fleet,
 I leave thy covert haunt untrod,
 And envy Science not her feat
 To make a twice-told tale of God.

ALADDIN

WHEN I was a beggarly boy,
 And lived in a cellar damp,
 I had not a friend nor a toy,
 But I had Aladdin's lamp;
 When I could not sleep for the cold,
 I had fire enough in my brain,
 And builded, with roofs of gold,
 My beautiful castles in Spain!

Since then I have toiled day and night,
 I have money and power good store,
 But I'd give all my lamps of silver bright
 For the one that is mine no more;
 Take, Fortune, whatever you choose,
 You gave, and may snatch again;
 I have nothing 't would pain me to lose,
 For I own no more castles in Spain!

25

AIDS TO THE STUDY OF THE VISION OF
SIR LAUNFAL

BY H. A. DAVIDSON

30

THE STUDY OF THE VISION OF SIR LAUNFAL

35

LOWELL's interpretation of the poet's mission is given in his own words in a letter to his friend, C. F. Briggs, dated February 18, 1846. He writes, . . . "my calling is clear to me. I am never lifted up to any peak of vision — and moments of almost fearful inward illumination I have sometimes — but that when I look down in hope to see some valley of the Beautiful Mountains, I behold nothing but blackened ruins; and the moans of the downtrodden the world over — but chiefly here in our own land — come up to my ear, instead of the happy songs of the husbandmen reaping and binding the sheaves of light; yet these, too, I hear not seldom. Then I feel how great is the office of poet, could I but even dare to hope to fill it. Then it seems as if my heart would break in pouring out one glorious song that should be the gospel of Reform, full of consolation and strength to the oppressed, yet falling gently and restoringly as dew on the withered youth-flowers of the oppressor. That way my madness lies, if any."

The same conception of the poet's high mission as a leader of reform finds expression in many of Lowell's early poems, especially those in a small volume entitled *A Year's Life*, —

"Never had poets such high call before,
 Never can poets hope for higher one,
 . . .
 For he who settles Freedom's principles
 Writes the death-warrant of all tyranny;
 Who speaks the truth stabs Falsehood to the heart."
 From *L'Envoi*.

15